THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI E. PONNUSWAMY): (a) As on date there are 1680 retail outlets in Maharashtra.

(b) and (c) During the year 1998-99, Oil Companies have allotted 6 retail outlet dealerships under Open category and one retail outlet under 'SC category under the normal selection procedure of advertisement of the locations and selection through OSB/DSB. Oil Companies have reported that they have not received any adverse report against these dealerships.

Adulteration in petrol

96. SHRI PRAFULL GORADIA: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) what damage adulterated petrol does to moter-vehicles;

(b) whether Government have recently arrested five directors of company involved in petrol adulteration;

(c) if so, what action has been taken against them;

(d) whether these adulteration operations are limited only to Gujarat or extended to other parts of the country as well; and

(e) what steps have been taken to check it?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI E. PONNUSWAMY): (a) to (e) Adulteration of petrol with other products having different characteristics not meeting the required specifications of petrol may lead to reduced engine life, environmental pollution etc. State Govt. of Gujarat has arrested five Directors of a company for allegedly diverting solvents for adulteration under Prevention of Black Marketing and Maintenance of Essential Services Act 1980. Oil marketing companies carry out regular/surprise checks of retail outlets, to control various malpractices including adulteration. In addition, special drives are

launched by the oil companies both on their own and also under direction of Government from time to time to check malpractices. To prevent adulteration various steps like blue dyeing of kerosene (PDS), furfural doping, filter paper test, stock reconciliation, checking of retail outlets by mobile laboratories, etc. are taken by oil companies.

IOC offer to buy equity of IPCL

97. SHRI V. N. GADGIL: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether IOC offered to buy 25 percent of equity of IPCL at the price mentioned by Government; and

(b) why the offer was rejected?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI E. PONNUSWAMY): (a) and (b) There was no offer from IOC to buy 25% equity of IPCL at the price mentioned by the Government. However, IOC had only indicated its expression of interest to bid for the equity in IPCL.

Exemption of customs duty for exploration operations

98. SHRI A. VIJAYA RAGHAVAN: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have taken any decision to exempt the oil PSU's from customs duty for exploration operations;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government are giving any incentive to the private sector in this regard; and

(d) if so, whether the same is extended to the PSU's also?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI E. PONNUSWAMY): (a) and (b) As per Customs Notification No. 20/